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ABSTRACT

This paper first presents a historical perspective of the disadvantaged minority, using black people as an example. The following section presents a clinical perspective of the psycho-social characteristics of this group. These characteristics are laden with some accuracies and many fallacies: (1) the fallacy of wisdom belonging to whites; (2) the belief that ability will be rewarded with success, while the disadvantaged are concerned with survival; (3) the fallacy of white beauty; (4) the belief that the disadvantaged are becoming more powerful by expressing themselves; and (5) the fallacy that middle class Americans are present and future oriented, while the disadvantaged are present oriented and think in terms of immediate gratification. The author feels that at present the Model Cities program has turned into a fraud based upon a revolution of expectancy and is yielding false hopes. Only through unification will the blacks and browns succeed in altering this oppressive and dehumanizing culture. (KJ)

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Don Wilson

Symposium: Some Perspectives on Working with the Disadvantaged in an Urban Mental Health Program

"ME and THEE"

American Psychological Association

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My subject is the disadvantaged, generally, and specifically psycho-social characteristics. I will discuss this topic with you with several reservations:

1. So much has been written and said on this topic that I question what, if anything, I can add.

2. The people who live disadvantaged are so many, (¼ of our population: 50 million people.) It is presumptuous for me to speak for them. They are the poor: the poor and black, poor and brown, poor and white, and others who make up our racial urban and rural ghettos. They are also the aged poor who make up our geriatric ghettos. And they are also our migrant poor. They are also the Indian poor of our reservation ghettos.

3. My last reservation is that I do not have the right to speak about them as if I were speaking for them. Middle class white America does not have this right...we lost it from the very beginning...in 1619 when two blacks, Anthony and Isabella were landed at Jamestown, as indentured servants, one year before the Mayflower. We lost the right again in 1690 when the bulk of Africans were brought into this country and sold as slaves. The disadvantaged can speak for themselves and should be talking to you in place of me.

Then why am I here, why did I accept? At one time I thought I knew nothing meaningful about the disadvantaged...then egotistically, I began to think I knew...and began giving talks and some writing...during these moments of arrogance I made plans to be here. Now I have come full circle and profess my confusion. But I will speak for myself and attempt to convey some of what I feel and think, and ask their forgiveness for the hypocracy of my standing here. But others have been more confused that I:

Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan said in 1963..."The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect".

Professor Galbraith in "The Affluent Society" stated that poverty in this country is no longer "a massive affliction but more nearly an after-thought." He also reasoned that poverty must be due to individual defects, since "nearly everyone else has mastered his environment."

Let's take a look at some of these people who are "after thoughts." Specifically, lets join those who "have no values or culture to guard and protect."

For nearly 300 years, blacks have been born in this country into a social system which rejects him at birth, places him in a caste system, and proceeds in a methodical manner to crush his human potential. The Blacks have a heritage...an African heritage, a human heritage....which is not what many Americans believe.

The center of the African civilization was the family...strong, viable, interwoven into a large kinship network. Marriage and family were locked into thousands of years of tradition and custom. In addition to the strong family tradition of the African, a striking feature of this family was the strong dominant role of the African man. Custom and tradition tempered his authority with gentleness and guidance affording a care and protection not common in modern societies. Compare this with Welfare rules which have forced the un-employed husband and father to desert his family so that they can survive on ADC. The slaves were as civilized and respectable as the New World masters who owned them...except the African family was an intimate part of an even closer kinship network. What happened to these people with a sensitive, well organized, intimate family tradition. An ex-slave tells this account of marriage on a plantation:

"When you married, you had to jump over a broom three times. Dat was de license. If master seen two slaves together too much he would tell 'em dey was married. Hit didn't make no difference if you wanted to or not; he would

put you in de same cabin an' make you live together...Marsa used to sometimes pick our wives fo' us. If he didn't have on his place enough women for the men, he would wait on de side of de road till a big wagon loaded with slaves come by. Den Marsa would stop de ole nigger-trader and buy you a woman. Wasn't no use tryin' to pick one, cause Marsa wasn't gonna pay but so much for her. All he wanted was a young healthy one who looked like she could have children.

Families were broken up at the moment of being kidnapped. Families that survived the trip to the New World were broken up at the slave market. And there was the widespread practice of breeding slaves for sale, like cattle.

Olaudah Equiano later known as Gustavus Vassa was born in Africa in 1745.... kidnapped from his home and family at the age of 11. In his autobiography, written in 1791, he tells of his experience at the age of 11.

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon connected with terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief.

....When I looked round the ship and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countencnces expressing defection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

....I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything.

I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely.

....I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water; and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself.

The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. Happily perhaps for myself I was soon reduced so low that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries.

In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us? They gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought, if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate.

It has been estimated that every slave who reached the New World represented five corpses enroute. 40 million were transported into slavery.

I have presented a brief overview of black history...the same could be done for other disadvantaged groups, such as Indians and migrant workers. I will make a few comments about the Chicano in recent times. Here is a brief conversation with Mrs. Roma, who lives in a San Antonio barrio...which is San Antonio's Westside with as many as 200,000 Chicanos herded together in one of America's largest ghettos:

How many children do you have?	6
Where do you live?	With my father-in-law
How many rooms do you have?	1
One room for 8 of you?	Yes
Do you do your cooking in this room?	Yes
What kind of stove do you have?	Kerosene
Do you have enough to eat?	We have $25 a week for food
What does this food consist of?	Beans, potatoes, eggs, string beans or peas.
Do you see any meat at all in your house?	Oh yes, sometimes chicken.
Do the children get any milk?	No

Another problem which has existed for years -- the effort of middle class America to deny a person's heritage. Children are taught to forget their "foreign" ways. Children have been cajoled, threatened, and punished for speaking Spanish. In one school in South Texas the children were forced to kneel in the playground and beg forgiveness for uttering a Spanish word. A teacher in Tucson, Arizona, proudly tells how she teaches English. The child who answers in Spanish walks to her desk and drops a penny in a bowl for every Spanish word. She boasts - it works. They come from poor families you know. Carlos describes an incident of his boyhood humiliation when he raised his hand in the classroom:

> Carlos, what do you want?
>
> I have to go to the bathroom...he whispered in Spanish.
>
> English, the teacher rebuked him. We speak English in school Carlos. You ask in English or sit down.
>
> This ten year old boy looked at the teacher with fear and awe...and does not know what to do. Suddenly his eyes lit up with a mischievous thought.
>
> If you don't let me go to the bathroom... again in Spanish...maybe I piss on your shoes.

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Now I will turn from the historical perspective to a clinical perspective of psycho-social characteristics. It is important clinically to have an understanding of how these subcultures came to be. It is amazing how little we know.. and our understanding of disadvantaged behavior is hampered by many sterotypes and misconceptions. Characteristics are generalizations and whereas they may increase the odds for accuracy in our perception, they can often be no more than cliched wisdom, rigidly applied to individuals, and hindrances instead of helps. Mass media has dramatized the sensationalism in the lives of the disadvantaged - violence, brutalization, and defiance. These sub-cultures are held responsible for much physical aggression and destruction of property. Some hold that poverty is their just reward. They are also thought of as unreliable,

untruthful, insincere, antisocial, no insight, unresponsive to general interpersonal relations, orality and confusion of sexual identification, rebellious, project blame for actions onto others, and identity difficulty leading to a formless or confused ego-ideal. Conversely, the poor have also been described as blessed, virtuous, upright, serene, honest, and kind. Black slaves were and migrant workers are, thought of as dancing, laughing, and happy. We say disadvantaged...but are often thinking of the disadvantaged family as a tangle of pathology. Our descriptions cause us to type the disadvantaged in the direction of schizophrenia and character disorders. This way of thinking is a trap. The disadvantaged groups are subcultures of our larger society just as we are. If anyone is disadvantaged, we are because of our inability to understand. If there is any pathology, it is mostly ours for it is the middle class society that has caused the alienation and inhumanity. We have become entrapped in the traditional view of "noblesse oblige"...which is the stance of the affluent reaching down to help the impoverished...it implies a role-set of strong and weak, healthy and sick, powerful and powerless.

This transition from the historical perspective to the present should not be difficult. The slave history, for example, is recent history....just ask the grandmothers and grandfathers of the people you serve. What is history, is a vital part of the families of the disadvantaged today. The people who grow up in these sub-cultures have strong feelings of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority.

Psycho-social characteristics of the disadvantaged are ladden with some accuracies and many fallacies.

There is the fallacy of wisdom, which is the illusion that the whites have most of the wisdom. This has direct application to the way in which many studies and solutions are sought in the area of race relations. Kenneth Clark has described an incident this way during a symposium with James Baldwin and

several white liberals:

"In this very room, about 24 hours ago, a group of social scientists, liberal social scientists, met to talk about how they could be more effective in the study of race relations. The chairman of the department of social psychology at a major university in America said that he had got some money to do something in the area of race relations. So what did he do? He and his department decided that they would NOT hire anybody who had done any research in race relations; they would hire somebody who had done extrememly good experimental work in the psychology of visual perception. When I heard that, I suspected as a Negro - bitter, distorted - that maybe one reason they did not invite anyone who had done work in race relations was that they might have had to think of a Negro."

Middle class America is concerned with career solidarity, education, advancement, respectability, and wealth. We believe that ability will be rewarded with success. The disadvantaged are concerned with survival. Take away a man's work and he feels isolated, frustrated, lost. He loses face with his wife and children, no matter how hard they try to protect him. If his wife and children get jobs, this is further defeat. Family relationships become strained. Unemployment leads to bills and no money for food or rent. The stresses accumulate. In a society where personality is organized around work, where a worker depends on his job for his very ties to the world, where he must have a job to provide for his family...anything that threatens that job is a catastrophe...economically and every other way.

There is the fallacy of beauty, that white people are more beautiful than blacks. This is widespread, but at least this is being attacked through "black is beautiful", Ebony magazine, etc.

Much has been said about the powerlessness of the disadvantaged. We are in a social revolt, with the consumers demanding a role in the determination of services. We are not only being asked to abandon or modify our traditional approaches, but to shed the delusion of superiority and engage in an interaction of equals. A new equality is emerging between the caregiver and consumer which can humanize the professional and support an action-oriented responsible role of the citizen. The patient is no longer just a patient, nor only a client, but

a citizen-consumer with power to affect his circumstances. The searing reality is that the disadvantaged person will no longer accept the image society has created for him. Dehumanization, as expressed through a powerlessness to control events and solve problems, is being reversed.

Middle class America is present and future oriented. We can delay gratification, postpone satisfaction. We can anticipate our summer vacation and receive growing satisfaction from the planning. We can think of long-range goals...what we will do with the money when the car is paid off, the annual raise, completing graduate work, the dinner party next month, and the day off next week. The disadvantaged are present-oriented and think in terms of immediate gratification. For them it is futile to think of the future... they have not had the power to affect their future. Their interest is restricted to the personal, the intimate, the family, and the neighborhood. The outside world cannot be trusted and must be defended against.

From the historical perspective to the clinical perspective and now to present solutions and cures.

The A. Philip Randolph Institute has defined 7 basic objections called the Freedom Budget:

(1) To restore full employment as rapidly as possible, and to maintain it thereafter, for all able and willing to work, and for all whom adequate training and education would make able and willing.

(2) To assure adequate incomes for those employed.

(3) To guarantee a minimum adequacy level of income to all those who cannot or should not be gainfully employed.

(4) To wipe out the slum ghettos, and provide a decent home for every American family, within a decade.

(5) To provide, for all Americans, modern medical care and educational opportunity up to the limits of their abilities and ambitions, at costs within their means.

(6) To overcome other manifestations of neglect in the public sector, by purifying our airs and waters, and bringing our transportation systems and natural resource development into line with the needs of a growing population and an expanding economy.

(7) To unite sustained full employment with sustained full production and high economic growth.

We know that Emancipation was a catastrophic social crisis for the ex-slave. Reconstruction or equalization was a colossal failure. We, have Model Cities...the reconstruction or equalization program of today. A massive federally sponsored revolution to change the ghetto scene through combined federal and local monies, the expertise of the experts, and based upon the involvement and participation of the disadvantaged. A noble experiment to erase the powerful-powerless polarization. A Chicano ex-alcoholic told me last week that psychiatrists cannot help the alcoholic. The only person who can help is the person one step ahead of the alcoholic. This is a simple explanation of resident participation and consumer power.

Where does Model Cities stand today. An example is that in Philadelphia the residents had to obtain a legal ruling to force the power structure to share the power. I submit that the Model Cities program while it may be laudable on paper, has turned into a fraud based upon a revolutuion of expectancy, and yielding false hopes. Rather than reconstruction or equalization, it is a pacification program designed to upgrade the existing power structures and middle class, give token services to the disadvantaged, and keep them quiet. The Chicano and blacks can win in two ways:

1. They can succeed in obtaining shared power and have the authority to determine not only the needs of the ghettos, but what is to be done and how it is to be done.

2. If they do not obtain the power of self determination, they will win if they can kill the program.

I say they will win if either of these two objectives are met, because

either one will serve to further unite the minority groups. Only through unification will the blacks and browns succeed in altering our oppressive and dehumanizing culture. This, to me, is the greatest social impact of Model Cities. This is not to belittle the services designed to be offered through Model Cities, but that is not the battle or the issue. They will lose through Model Cities if they do not obtain power and allow the program to continue, for it will then succeed as a pacification program.

Last week I rapped with some people, black and brown program aides, and they say the so-called resident positions in Model Cities are designed to use them. The existing systems want them to sell their brother on the power structure's programs, even though they have little to say about its character. They are told to make contact with a local group to pave the way. In their words... "if the group does not kick their asses out, then the pros step in and take over. In other words, tell your brothers we have something to offer even though you can't understand it." The people employed as residents under Model Cities are in a very difficult position. They realize that blacks and browns are still thought of as "militant, poor and worthless. By accepting positions with the white power structure they are called "token niggers" and "uncle Toms." Yet they believe that through this program they may be able to secure real power to involve, uplift, and humanize their brothers. But they know they have to speak with forked tongues. How can they feel that way when they are given good positions, good salaries, and title! Among psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists...the title Program Aide is degrading, yet they are expected to carry the brunt of selling the programs. In Denver the Program Aides are not even allowed to start out at the lofty position of Program Aide...but for six months must serve as a Neighborhood Aide Trainee, without city fringe benefits such as vacation time, sick leave, or paid holidays. Their salary does qualify

them for food stamps.

Model Cities programs should continue as a result of going to the resident groups and saying: you decided the needs of your people, you had nothing to say about how or what was to be done, you tell us what should be done and how. We will work for you because it is your program. For over 300 years we have failed to include you as equal citizens, and we have failed in solving your problems. If we continue in this bureaucratic burlesque, we will certainly fail again. It has been said many times that you have disengaged yourselves from our society. How can you be disengaged when you have never been engaged.

Clorinda Margolis, Ph.D., with the Jefferson Community Mental Health Center in Philadelphia has said:

> "Despite all the surveys, studies, and money poured into projects to improve housing, job prospects, and the like, efforts thus far by the white community or the middle-class black community have had little impact on altering the course of the black man's life, his feelings about himself, and his ability to make a place for himself in a primarily white world. In fact, well-meaning whites, individually and through institutions, find themselves reinforcing the black man's sense of worthlessness by entering the ghetto system as 'helpers', an act that only emphasizes the need for such help. Whites' attempts to change the black man's psychological status by offers of treatment and rehabilitation thus may be doomed to failure. A sense of manhood is perhaps the key to what the black man is trying to achieve."

In conclusion, I offer a quote from George Drysdale:

"Thus the disadvantaged toil on, as long as their strength permits. At last some organ gives way, the stomach, the eyes, or the brain; his family is reduced to the brink of starvation. Often this man, rendered desparate by his hopeless position, plunges into drink and gives himself over to ruin. At other times he is in a frenzy of rage over the infernal circumstances. Hence result the terrible social revolutions that have in recent times so often convulsed society. But they are in vain; they are but the blind effort of men to do something or die. The mountain of misery invariably falls back again upon their

breasts with only increased pressure...and forces them, worn out by their struggles, to bear it quietly for another season."

Drysdale wrote this in 1854, 116 years ago.

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